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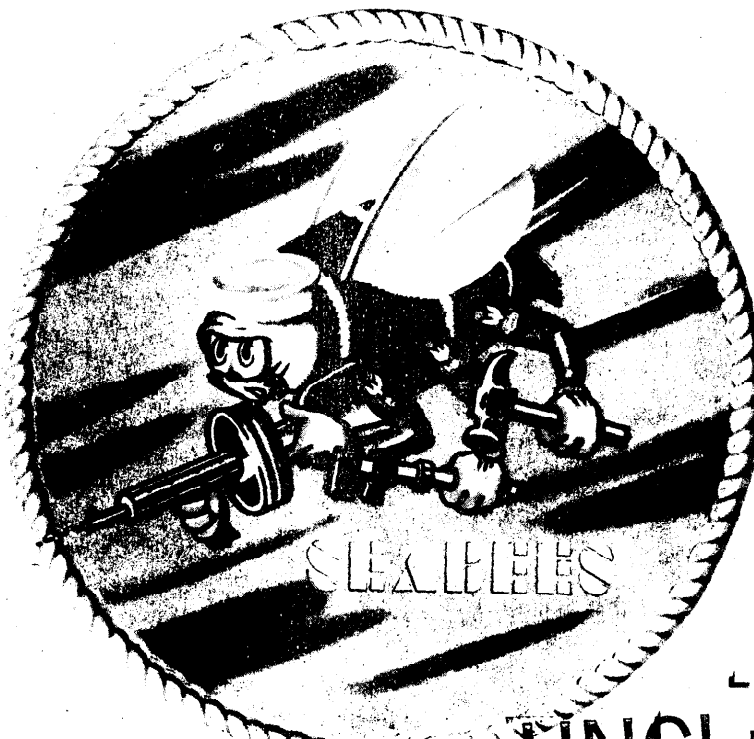
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# LESSONS LEARNED



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HEADQUARTERS  
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM  
APO 143, San Francisco, California

3000  
Ser: 0889  
28 July 1964

MACJ323

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 41: Operations of Seabee Technical Assistance Teams (STATs) in Vietnam (Continuation of MAAG Lessons Learned)

TO: See Distribution

1. (U) Attached as Inclosure 1 is the latest "Lessons Learned" from counterinsurgency operations in the Republic of Vietnam.

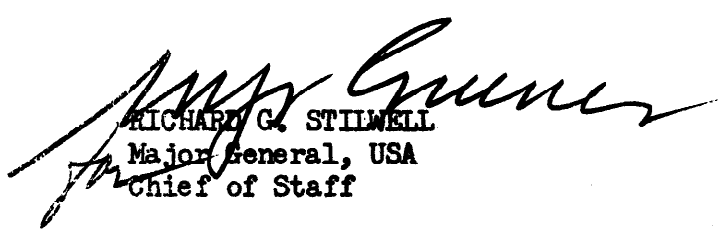
2. (U) The information contained in "Lessons Learned" is primarily intended for use by US Advisors in Vietnam. Lessons may be of value for direct application, or they may simply reinforce existing tactics, techniques, or doctrine.

3. (CMHA) Attached document is classified CONFIDENTIAL to permit freedom of expression and careful analysis of operational methods and tactics of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, to protect US advisor-counterpart relations and to deny any possible use by insurgent forces. Special handling is required under the applicable provisions of DA-DCMI(A) when released to friendly nations. Release to personnel of the Republic of Vietnam will be governed by the provisions of MACV Directive 380-4, 11 Apr 64. Sanitized versions of this information omitting dates, names of locations and participating personnel and units may be prepared for instructional purposes and/or official US Army, Navy, or Air Force publications.

4. (U) Comments, questions and requests for changes in distribution should be addressed to this headquarters, ATTN: J323.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

1 Incl  
as

  
RICHARD G. STILLWELL  
Major General, USA  
Chief of Staff

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SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 41: Operations of Seabee Technical Assistance Teams (STATs) in Vietnam

I. BACKGROUND:

A. Seabee Technical Assistance Teams (STATS) are composed of one Engineer Officer and twelve enlisted Construction Specialists with a wide variety of construction skills. These US Navy Teams have been especially equipped, trained and manned to perform civic action and military engineering assignments in a counterinsurgency situation. The standard composition of these teams, their equipment, and capabilities are under constant study and revision to meet the changing requirements of the counterinsurgency situation in RVN.

B. In January 1963, two of these teams were introduced into Vietnam to support US Special Forces in camp construction, civic action and military engineering under the CIDG Program.

C. In October 1963, two additional STATS arrived in Vietnam to support the USOM Province Rehabilitation Program. (New Rural Life Program).

D. To date the four (4) in-country STATS have been employed in twenty three (23) locations in the Republic of Vietnam. They have accomplished the following construction:

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| 1. Air Strips (Minimum length - 1800 feet)  | 10     |
| 2. Roads  | 410 km |
| 3. Bridges constructed/rebuilt  | 82     |
| 4. Bridges repaired   | 15     |
| 5. Drilled wells  | 36     |
| 6. New Life Hamlets designed and constructed  | 8      |
| 7. Vietnamese personnel trained (approximate)   | 1750   |
| 8. Miscellaneous military engineering tasks (e.g. fields of fire, ammo bunkers, gun emplacements, fortifications, etc). |        |
| 9. Miscellaneous civic action tasks (e.g. schools, province facilities, latrines, etc).                                 |        |

II. CURRENT STATUS:

A. Of the four STATS now in-country, one is employed in BINH LONG Province and one in KHANH HOA Province in support of the CIDG Program;

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one in QUANG NGAI Province and one in QUANG TRI Province in support of the USOM Province Rehabilitation Program (New Rural Life Program).

B. GVN/USOM have requested 8 additional STAT type units and have provided the funds for support. The increased interest in STATS and their demonstrated capability to contribute significantly to the counterinsurgency effort led to a recommendation by COMUSMACV that the Department of the Army consider the formation of similar small engineering units. It now appears the 25th Division will form and supply the 8 additional STAT type units now programmed for support of USOM.

C. DOD has indicated additional STATS may be available and requested requirements for teams from several addressees, including COMUSMACV. The response to this request listed requirements for the 8 teams above and indicated the possibility that two additional STATS to support the VNN Junk Force, and a maximum of 100 Seabee personnel to construct inland waterway barriers in the Delta area might be required in the future.

### III. FUTURE ACTIONS:

A. A concerted effort to publicize the activities of STATS to the Vietnamese people will be made.

B. Plans will continue to integrate the STATS now programmed and requested into Province Pacification Plans.

C. Plans to employ STATS with the VNN Junk Force and in inland waterway security construction will be studied. If this employment is found feasible and productive, the project will be implemented.

### IV. LESSONS LEARNED:

The following lessons have been learned from the operations of STATS in Vietnam over the past eighteen months:

A. Lesson. A psychological warfare effort applied in conjunction with the STAT Program can greatly increase the benefits derived from the employment of STATS in a civic action role.

#### 1. Discussion.

(a) On some occasions, STATS have entered new districts in Vietnam prior to adequate indoctrination of district, village, and hamlet officials, and the local populace as to the STAT's aims, capabilities, and support requirements (local labor, construction materials, security forces, etc). This lack of pre-indoctrination resulted in considerable productive time being lost as the officials and populace were not prepared to provide support required.

(b) It is extremely difficult to obtain volunteer labor on civic action projects in Vietnam. Masons have been known to refuse to work on schoolhouses for their children. People observing a STAT performing menial labor on culvert and bridge projects have not only refused to assist but have demanded excessive rental for hoes and shovels. People refuse bulgar wheat and demand payment in money or rice for assisting on civic action projects in their hamlet.

(c) Subsequent to a STAT's departure from some areas, the local officials and populace have not continued with the socio-economic improvement program initiated by the STAT. Further, on some occasions Viet Cong agents have actually turned a STAT's achievements to their own benefit. For example, they have convinced the local populace that a road and bridges built to provide the populace of several hamlets with an improved means of access and egress to market centers were actually built to provide ARVN troops with a means to enter their villages, destroy their crops, steal their food and water, harass their women, etc.

2. Action recommended. Since STAT personnel have received no political or psychological warfare training, assign psychological warfare experts (1) to precede a STAT into a new area for the purpose of developing projects desired by the populace and obtaining commitments for the required support; (2) to accompany STAT's during employment in an area for the purpose of insuring the STAT is accomplishing worthwhile projects, that they receive the required support, and that their efforts are effectively exploited; and (3) to follow-up after departure of STAT's to insure effective exploitation of their achievements and to encourage the local populace to continue the civic action construction program initiated by the STAT.

B. Lesson. The rated capacity of many highway bridges in Vietnam is incorrect.

1. Discussion. Many highway bridges in Vietnam are known to have supported loads which greatly exceeded the bridges' posted capacity. One bridge with a posted capacity of four tons supported a load of SEABEE equipment exceeding 25 tons.

2. Action recommended. Encourage Vietnamese engineers to more accurately assess the local capacity of highway bridges. Revise current LOC maps accordingly.

C. Lesson. Receipts must be obtained upon payment of all bills.

1. Discussion. The matter of "face" is very important in Vietnam. As a result, some STAT personnel have been reluctant to demand receipts for bills paid since they have felt such demand would denote lack of trust (and resultant loss of face) in the individual paid. Subsequently, a second bill has been presented for the same services or goods. When the matter is brought to the attention of the local officials, as inevitably happens, a serious misunderstanding may result which can only be remedied by a second paying of the bill.

2. Action recommended. Advise personnel deploying to Vietnam accordingly.

D. Lesson. In Vietnam it is unwise to employ a labor force or to conduct a training program without a native supervisor to direct all trainees and/or labor crews.

1. Discussion:

(a) Several near incidents have occurred because the STAT Officer in Charge had no authority over his assigned trainees, and no one on-site had overall charge of the trainees.

(b) Productivity of work crews notably increased when a native supervisor to exercise overall control and supervision was assigned.

2. Action recommended. Agencies and officials providing trainees and work forces should be encouraged to provide a native supervisor to obtain maximum return from their initial investment. The on-site U.S. Officer in Charge must have authority over this native supervisor.

E. Lesson. All trucks employed by construction units in Vietnam should be equipped with winches.

1. Discussion. The generally poor condition of the roads in South-east Asia (especially during the rainy season) frequently require winches to recover vehicles and construction equipment from mud holes and ditches.

2. Action recommended. Equip all trucks deploying with construction units to Vietnam with winches and extrashear pins.

F. Lesson. Increased preventive maintenance is required for automotive/construction equipment employed in rural areas of Vietnam.

1. Discussion. Dirty fuel and dusty conditions in the rural areas result in excessive equipment repairs if the vehicles and equipment servicing is not increased appreciably.

2. Action recommended.

(a) Establish automotive/construction equipment preventive maintenance cycles of 15 to 20 days in the rural areas.

(b) For all equipment deployed to Vietnam triple the number of fuel filters and oil filter elements normally provided the equipment.

G. Lesson. Vietnamese personnel frequently will not effectively maintain mechanical apparatus installed for their benefit.

1. Discussion. This lack of maintenance is evidenced in the many simple farm-type hand pumps throughout Vietnam which are inoperable only because replacement of the pump leather is required. This situation exists in spite of the high value placed on the wells by the local populace.



2. Action recommended. Advise all civic construction personnel in Vietnam not to install mechanical apparatus prior to provision of maintenance personnel or maintenance trainees by the local officials.

H. Lesson. In convoys over roads subject to mining, a heavy vehicle should lead the convoy and all vehicles should be sandbagged or should have the floorboards boiler plated.

1. Discussion.

(a) In October 1963 a SEABEE 5-ton dump truck, the second vehicle in a convoy, struck a cluster of three pressure mines. (The lead vehicle carrying security troops had narrowly missed the mines). Although the mined truck was severely damaged, no one was injured and the truck neither rolled nor left the road. A smaller vehicle and its occupants would have been destroyed

(b) In March 1964 a SEABEE 3/4-ton truck struck an electrically detonated mine and was damaged beyond economical repair. The SEABEE driver was only slightly injured; the other three occupants received no injuries. Thorough sandbagging of the vehicle absorbed the shrapnel from the blast and prevented death or serious injury to the vehicle's occupants.

2. Action recommended.

(a) Position a heavy vehicle at the head of convoys over roads susceptible to mining.

(b) Sandbag or boiler plate the floorboards of all vehicles in areas susceptible to mining.

I. Lesson. To minimize the frequency of required trips over roads subject to hostile fire, teams employed in isolated areas must be provided with a reliable means of voice communication with their headquarters unit. Such communication capability is also highly desirable for reducing lost manhours and wear on vehicles committed to logistic and administrative support trips.

1. Discussion. Each deployed SEABEE unit in Vietnam is provided with a single sideband radio for voice communication with its headquarters unit in Saigon. This communication capability permits a rapid ordering of equipment repair parts, construction materials, special tools, food, medical supplies, etc., and provides a means for requesting emergency medical evacuation. It reduces wear and tear on logistic vehicles, increases productive man hours on assigned construction projects, and decreases the frequency of overland trips through hostile areas. The radios are easily operated and require very little maintenance, thereby necessitating a minimum of special training. Approximately one hour is required to train a man to install, operate, and perform minor maintenance on the radio.

2. Action recommended. Provide all construction teams employed in isolated areas of Southeast Asia with single sideband radios.

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